

# GOLD RUSH GIRL

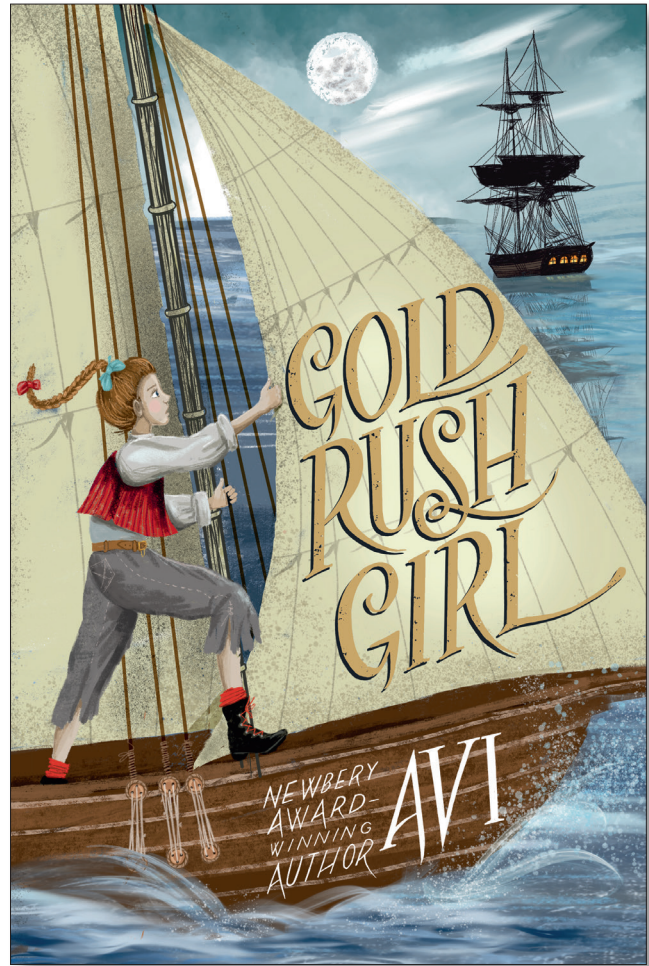
Avi

## About the Book

In 1848, Victoria Blaisdell, a thirteen-year-old who longs for adventure, takes control of her own destiny by becoming a stowaway. She secretly boards the ship her father and younger brother, Jacob, are taking from Rhode Island to join the California gold rush. Tory leaves behind her sedate life and revels in her new independence in mud-caked, tent-filled San Francisco. Left to care for her brother while her father seeks gold, she makes two good friends who prove invaluable when Jacob is kidnapped. Can the three of them track down and rescue Jacob from one of the hundreds of abandoned ships in San Francisco Bay? In this vivid historical novel, a proper New England girl becomes the adventurous hero of her own story.

## About the Author

Avi, one of the most celebrated children's writers, has been awarded a Newbery Medal, two Newbery Honors, two *Boston Globe-Horn Book* Awards, a Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction, and a Christopher Award. Avi was raised in Brooklyn and lived for some years on Sheldon Street in Providence, Rhode Island, but now he makes his home in Colorado.



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## Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS. ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS. ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.



## *Discussion Questions*

1. On the first page, Tory explains that she was struck by lightning, meaning gold, which was the “shatter-wit world of those who seek it.” What does she mean by that? Why does she compare gold to lightning? How does gold turn her world “topsy-turvy,” and how does it lead to her doing “things I never dreamed I would or could do” (page 1)?
2. The book opens in Providence, Rhode Island, but most of it takes place in San Francisco, California. Compare the two cities at that time. What surprises Tory about San Francisco when she first gets there? Contrast her living situations in the two cities and how she feels about both.
3. Describe the restrictions on Tory as a girl in Providence and compare them to her restrictions in San Francisco. Why does she have so much freedom in California? Why aren’t there more girls and women there? What parts of Tory’s new life would shock Aunt Lavinia? What judgments do you think Aunt Lavinia would make about those changes?
4. Why are books so important in Tory’s life in Providence? Discuss her belief that the value of reading “is not to learn about others. It is to learn about oneself” (page 7). She goes on to say that *Jane Eyre* “transformed my life” (page 7). Why does she think that? She describes *Jane Eyre* as living “a life written with exclamation points!!!!” (page 9). How is that also true of Tory?
5. What kind of person is Jacob? Describe his relationship with Tory in Providence and how it changes when they get to San Francisco. Compare their reactions to San Francisco. Why does Tory describe Jacob as clinging “like a barnacle” (page 91)? Explain how Jacob goes missing and why Tory feels so guilty about it.
6. What is Tory’s father like in Providence, and why does she find him frustrating? Why does he believe that it will be easy to find gold and get rich in California? What was the reality? Discuss the extent to which Father’s prediction was or wasn’t true: “The only thing that will change is our geography” (page 24).
7. How does Tory feel about her mother? At what points does her view of her mother change? What is Mother’s reaction to San Francisco, and why? What is her reaction to how Tory has changed? How do you think Mother felt about Tory’s announcement that she was headed to the gold fields?
8. Why doesn’t Father want to take Tory with him to San Francisco? Why is he willing to take Jacob? Why does Tory want to go so badly? Explain how she manages to sneak aboard the ship. What does the action show about Tory’s character? How do her mother and brother help her, and why? What is her father’s reaction?
9. Why do you think Tory and Thad become such good friends? What is Thad like? What is his background? How does he help Tory, and how does she help him?
10. Where is Sam from, and how did he end up in San Francisco? What is Sam’s situation there? Describe what he does for work and where he lives. What happened to Sam’s brother? What obstacles does Sam face because he’s black?

11. Why is Sam reluctant to become friends with Tory? How does that change? What knowledge and skills does he have that Thad and Tory lack? Describe how Sam is instrumental in saving Jacob, why he does it, and what price he pays in the process. What are Sam's hopes and dreams, and how does Tory plan to help him achieve them?
12. Why is Señor Rosales in San Francisco, and where is his family? Tory describes him as "wise, kind, and generous" (page 82). Find scenes where he shows these qualities. How does he make a living? What other ways of making money does Tory see in San Francisco that don't include digging for gold?
13. Who would you characterize as the villains in the story? Describe them, their actions, and their motivations. What makes them effective villains? What happens to them at the end, and why?
14. Describe the plan that Tory and her friends devise for rescuing Jacob. What part do each of them play in the rescue? What are some setbacks and dangers they face, and how do they overcome them? What will happen to Jacob if they don't succeed?
15. The rescue leads them into an area of the San Francisco Bay called Rotten Row. Why is it called that? Why are the ships there? Why are they so important to the story? How do the number of ships and their condition make it difficult for the friends to find Jacob? Talk about what happened to the ships historically and whether the history of the ships surprised you.
16. What do you think lies ahead for Tory, Thad, and Sam at the end of the novel? Discuss the new name of their ship, *Our Destiny*, and tie it in to Tory's reading of *Jane Eyre*. Find examples of how Tory decides her own destiny throughout the story.
17. From the beginning, Tory's narrative uses metaphors, similes, and other figurative language to paint pictures and convey meaning. When the book opens, her family's untroubled life is "as smooth as Chinese silk" (page 2). Aunt Lavinia's shape reminds Tory of "a walking mountain, and a volcano at that" (page 3). Discuss these comparisons and their effect on you as a reader. Find other examples of figurative speech in the novel and talk about what they add.
18. How does the author create excitement and suspense in the story? What parts of the plot are especially dramatic? Find elements of the storytelling, such as cliffhangers, that create suspense. Analyze the language and sentences in a particularly fast-paced scene to see what makes it exciting.

These questions were prepared by Kathleen Odean, a school librarian for more than fifteen years who now gives professional development workshops for educators about new books for children and teens. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on earlier Caldecott and Newbery Award Committees.



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